



I Get No Respect...

The Rodney Dangerfield of the wine world is indisputably Cabernet Franc. The name refers to royalty yet it is not a “Noble” grape. Disparaged in “*Sideways*” it got the last laugh in the end... the **1961 Cheval Blanc** was made of Cabernet Franc and that other grape Miles hated, Merlot!

I’m thrilled that this month’s release includes Cabernet Franc, given it is a personal favorite of mine - not to mention a financial investment. Each July at Stuart Cellars’ futures wine event, I fall in love at the Cab Franc barrel, then have to wait months anticipating what it will be like when I finally get to open the first bottle.

Good things come to those who wait!

Cabernet Franc is a red Bordeaux grape, father of Cabernet Sauvignon. Although it plays third fiddle (behind Merlot) to its son in Bordeaux, it is a grape that produces wines of distinction when created by the right winemaker. An acquired taste with its tobacco-laced, herbaceous austerity - the best wines also feature the smooth cherry-berry notes that run in the Cabernet family. Once hooked, you’ll come back for more, especially those created by Marshall.

It is a versatile grape. Used as a blending wine to give structure and backbone to most Bordeaux *Appellation d’origine Contrôlée* wines, in renowned St. Emilion, Cab Franc accounts for two thirds of the acreage laid to vine - no acreage there is devoted to Cabernet Sauvignon. Shocking, but true. Some of the most highly acclaimed wines of Bordeaux are created without a drop of Cabernet Sauvignon. Sip on that, Miles!

The movie “*Sideways*” is a study in misdirection with virtually every comment the snobbish Miles makes on grapes and wine. He dismisses the varietal calling it “hollow, flabby and overripe” - something most Cab Francs are not. In California, Cabernet Franc is often used as the third component in meritage-style wine. It also is gaining popularity in many Super Tuscan blends.

While it lends a lot of talent to those combinations, I see it as a star in its own right at many Temecula wineries. The best Cabernet Francs are smooth and complex, able to accompany smoky grilled steak or blue-cheese topped filet mignon with equal ease. Add asparagus to either and it still works!

My favorite, naturally, is Marshall’s 100% Cabernet Franc. I have a vertical stacking back to 2000 (I’ve clearly been buying Cab Franc futures for years!) and the older ones are holding strong. Last July the 2007 Cabernet Franc was bursting with lush berry flavors and young tannin but was already smooth and full-feeling in the mouth... it definitely had the promise of a truly good vintage. Just one question:

Is my wine ready to pick up, Haley?